

the often slow process of methodically building bipartisan coalitions. A breakthrough in the Senate Judiciary Committee last week in beginning to come to grips with criminal justice reform is a fresh example of this and so was enactment this summer of the electronic surveillance reforms in our USA FREEDOM Act.

I would remind everybody, we are not alone in this body. Legislative work in a democracy in large part is the art of compromise. Compromise is essential in assimilating and digesting competing points of view and competing interests, which are all the more diverse in a large and heterogeneous nation like ours. We are not just some small nation made up of just one particular class of people. The remarkable strength of the United States is that we have people who came here from all over the world and made us a strong nation. And I think we Senators keep faith with our core values as we listen to the perspectives of others. Insisting on our way or no way at all is a sure-fire recipe for stalemate, to the great detriment of the entire Nation and the people we represent. As Winston Churchill once said: "The maxim, 'nothing avails but perfection,' may be spelled shorter: PARALYSIS."

Some measure of self-restraint is essential for a legislative body in a democratic republic like ours to function. Louis Brandeis once said, "Democracy substitutes self-restraint for external restraint. It is more difficult to maintain than to achieve." He was right. Self-restraint in a democracy is not an easy virtue.

In the previous Congress, as President pro tempore, I had the pleasure of accompanying Chaplain Barry Black to the podium as he offered the morning invocation. I like to think—maybe it is more that I like to hope—that some of his inspiration rubs off on us, at least a little, each day. One morning years ago, for instance, he said: "Give them (the Senators) the stature to see above the wall of prideful opinion." We can each point to each other, the other 99, and say: See, that is for you. We have to remember it is for us, too, each one of us.

I was talking, my wife Marcelle and I, last night about 15,000 votes. It didn't seem possible when I came here as a junior Member of the Senate. I also know there is a lot more work to do. I hope we can restore the bipartisan campaign finance reform that so many in this body—Republicans and Democrats—supported. I hope we can restore the historic and foundational Voting Rights Act. I hope we continue to fight to support our farmers, who give us food security and are the very fabric of this country. We are a nation that can feed ourselves. I think we should fight against government overreach in the wake of national security threats. Sometimes going into all our private matters is itself a national security threat. We should do more to support our veterans and their families. When

they come back from war, we should continue that support. We should expand education opportunity for all. My family came to Vermont in the 1850s. I became the first Leahy to get a college degree and my sister, the second one. We hope our children and grandchildren will have the same educational opportunities. We should rebuild the American middle class and offer helping hands to lift all Americans out of poverty. We should fund our roads and bridges. We build roads and bridges in other countries in wars where they sometimes get blown up. Let's build some in our own country where we need them. We should pass appropriations bills, not continuing resolutions. Pass them every year, each year. It is a lot of work, but not an insurmountable goal. It will take good will and bipartisan cooperation to achieve them.

We 100 Senators should never forget that we are but the public face of an institution that is supported by thousands of hard-working staff, our office aides and policy experts—my own, of course, among the best in the Senate—the Capitol Police, the folks who keep order and help to showcase this great building to millions of tourists, and those bright and dutiful Senate pages in the well of this Chamber, all of them are part of the Senate family.

The Senate at its best can be the conscience of the Nation. And I have seen that happen over the years when we've risen up together and expressed the conscience of the Nation. And I marvel in the fundamental soundness and wisdom of our system every time it does. We can't afford to put any part of the mechanism on automatic pilot. It takes constant work and vigilance to keep our society working.

It is easy for politicians to appeal to our worst instincts and to our selfishness. Political leaders serve best when they appeal to the best in us, to lift our sights, summon our will, and raise us to a higher level. I still get a thrill every time I walk in this building and walk out on this floor, knowing the history of this place, just knowing I am going to be a part of that history. Senators have come and gone, but I have had one partner through these 15,000 votes: my wife, Marcelle. We came here in 1975 with three wonderful children: Kevin, Alicia, and Mark. Alicia was here in the Chamber yesterday representing her husband, Lawrence, and their children. And I remember my parents and Marcelle's parents visiting often. I remember how much they enjoyed visiting here, seeing what we are doing. But I think they especially wanted to visit their three grandchildren. Well, now I look at our grandchildren—Roan, Francesca, Sophia, Patrick, and Fiona—and I understand how my parents felt.

I am so grateful to my fellow Vermonters for the confidence they have shown in me. It is a measure of trust that urges me on and which I will never betray or take for granted.

As I have reflected on these 15,000 votes, it reminds me of the significance every time we vote, why I feel energized about what votes lie ahead, and how we can keep making a difference.

I thank the distinguished Presiding Officer for his forbearance.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

COMMENDING SENATOR LEAHY

Mr. NELSON. Mr. President, I want to reflect on the comments the senior Senator from Vermont has shared. I want to say to Senator LEAHY that what he has reflected in the course of his career of casting 15,000 votes, spanned over four decades in the Senate—some would say the courtliness, the gentlemanliness, the bipartisanship, the deference, the respect, the honor—some would say these are old-fashioned ideas.

This Senator happens to feel they are American values, and how often have we seen those characteristics not on display? Tonight the House of Representatives is going to pass not only raising the debt ceiling so we can pay our bills but also a budget template—a blueprint—under which we can then appropriate the specifics.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, will the Senator yield for one moment?

Mr. NELSON. Absolutely.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, the Senator from Florida and I have been friends for decades. To get this praise from a man who served with distinction as a Congressman, a Senator, and an astronaut means a great deal to me. I thank him.

Mr. NELSON. The Senator is very gracious, but I stood to comment upon the characteristics he has exemplified in his public life that is a role model for all of us. I was about to say, here we are seeing tonight that the U.S. Congress is going to be able to move ahead without falling off the fiscal cliff because there is going to be a bipartisan vote in the House of Representatives. My goodness gracious, isn't this what it is supposed to be all about?

The Senator from Vermont can remember well over 30 years ago when this Senator was a young Congressman, and the role models in the House of Representatives at the time were Tip O'Neill and Bob Michel—the Democratic speaker and the leader of the Republicans. They had their fights, and at the end of the day they were personal friends. They had a personal relationship. They then could work out all the thorny problems and build consensus in order to govern.

I thank the Senator from Vermont.

TRANSPORTATION BILL

Mr. NELSON. Mr. President, I came to talk about the Transportation bill. We have it in front of us. Transportation has laid the foundation of our country's success, whether it was